



## **Meeting diverse clients' needs in academic service-learning: Motivation for collaboration**

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### **Summary**

Research demonstrates the benefits of academic service-learning (AS-L) for students who work with diverse client populations. Yet, little research has explored the challenges, from the perspective of community partners, of incorporating into their organizations students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds than the clients whom they serve. The purpose of this study is to understand the issues community partners face in working with AS-L students from different backgrounds than the organizations' clients.

This case study included 10 staff members from various organizations in a community in the southeastern U.S. The clients served by these organizations include children and adults who are homeless or living in poverty; those who have health care needs, including terminally ill patients; individuals with disabilities; and children with educational, social, and emotional needs. These organizations partnered with a medium-sized liberal arts university through internships, practicums, and service-learning classes. Eighty percent of the undergraduate students at this institution are white, 6% African American, 3% Hispanic American, 1% Asian American, 1% multiracial, 2% international students, and 7% unknown. Sixty percent are female while 40% are male, with the vast majority of students between the ages of 18 and 22. Eighty percent participate in some type of volunteer experience.

The participants identified two main benefits of working with students from different backgrounds than their clients: some students began without preconceived notions about the clients, and students had the opportunity to learn in-depth about this new community. They also identified two challenges associated with students' different backgrounds: lack of awareness of the community and the issues their clients face and fearfulness of clients when they begin working with the organizations.

These findings emphasize the need for faculty and community partners to anticipate these challenges and develop effective strategies to address them. As these strategies are developed, future research needs to examine various approaches in negating these challenges.

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